



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE
FEDERAL BUILDING, 10 West 15th St, Suite 3200
HELENA, MONTANA 59626

Ref: 8MO

July 14, 2009

Mr. Malcolm Edwards, District Ranger
Canoe Gulch Ranger District
12557 Highway 37
Libby, Montana 59923

Re: CEQ # 20090215, EPA Comments on Miller
West Fisher Project FEIS & ROD

Dear Mr. Edwards:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region VIII Montana Office has reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) for the Miller West Fisher Project in accordance with EPA responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4231 and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The EPA appreciates receipt of responses to agency and public comments and concerns provided during review of the DEIS. While we have some concerns regarding potential for erosion and sediment production/transport and associated water quality impacts during logging activities, we are pleased that the selected alternative, Alternative 6 Modified, involves no construction of new permanent roads; construction of only 3.29 miles of temporary road spurs; BMP implementation and maintenance work on 38.99 miles of road; additional restrictions on 0.62 miles of open road; long-term road storage and decommissioning of 20.63 miles of road, including restoring 20 stream crossings; and pool creation and bank stabilization in Miller and West Fisher Creeks. We are also pleased that less damaging logging methods would be used (i.e., 17% yarded by helicopter; 45% yarded by skyline cable; and 38% of the harvest restricted to logging on snow or frozen ground). The inclusion of watershed rehabilitation activities, including road system improvements, and use of less damaging timber harvesting methods should help mitigate adverse effects associated with erosion and sediment production and transport, and promote improved water quality over the long-term.

We want to note that one of the responses to our DEIS comments, in regard to assuring consistency of proposed activities with Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) preparation of a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and Water Quality Plan for the water quality impaired Fisher River, indicated that the DEIS had been sent to the Montana DEQ care of Jim Bauermeister, and no response from MDEQ had been received. The MDEQ staff person referred to in this response (Mr. Bauermeister) has not been with the MDEQ for several years. We recommend that Robert Ray and/or Dean Yashan at MDEQ be contacted for assuring

consistency of proposed activities with TMDLs (contact Robert Ray at 406-444-5319, and Dean Yashan at 406-444-5317). Mr. Ray is involved with implementing completed TMDLs and promoting consistency of watershed restoration activities where there are completed TMDLs, and Mr. Yashan is involved with development of TMDLs and promoting consistency of watershed activities with TMDLs in development.

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on EIS and participate in the NEPA process. If you have any questions please contact Mr. Steve Potts of my staff in Helena at 406-457-5022 or in Missoula at 406-329-3313 or via e-mail at potts.stephen@epa.gov. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John F. Wardell
Director
Montana Office

cc: Larry Svoboda/Connie Collins, EPA 8EPR-N, Denver
Robert Ray/Dean Yashan, MDEQ, Helena